

List of French expressions in English

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English contains many words of French origin, such as *art*, *competition*, *force*, *machine*, *money*, *police*, *publicity*, *role*, *routine*, *table*, and many other anglicized French words. These are pronounced according to English rules of phonology, rather than French. Around 45%^[1] of English vocabulary is of French origin, most coming from the Anglo-Norman spoken by the upper classes in England for several hundred years after the Norman Conquest, before the language settled into what became Modern English.

This article, however, covers words and phrases that generally entered the lexicon later, as through literature, the arts, diplomacy, and other cultural exchanges not involving conquests. As such, they have not lost their character as Gallicisms, or words that seem unmistakably foreign and "French" to an English speaker.

The phrases are given as used in English, and may seem correct modern French to English speakers, but may not be recognized as such by French speakers as many of them are now defunct or have drifted in meaning. A general rule is that, if the word or phrase retains French diacritics or is usually printed in italics, it has retained its French identity.

Few of these phrases are common knowledge to all English speakers, and for some English speakers most are rarely if ever used in daily conversation, but for other English speakers many of them are a routine part of both their conversational and their written vocabulary.

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Used in English and French

A

à gogo

in abundance. In French this is colloquial.

à la

in the manner of/in the style of^[2]

à la carte

lit. "on the menu"; In restaurants it refers to ordering individual dishes rather than a fixed-price meal.

à la mode

idiomatic: *in the style*; In the United States, the phrase is used to describe a dessert with an accompanying scoop of ice cream (example: apple pie à la mode). In French, it also means *trendy*.



Apéritifs with amuse-gueules

Boeuf à la mode for instance is a beef recipe with ale, carrots and onions.

à propos

regarding/concerning (the correct French syntax is *à propos de*)

accouchement

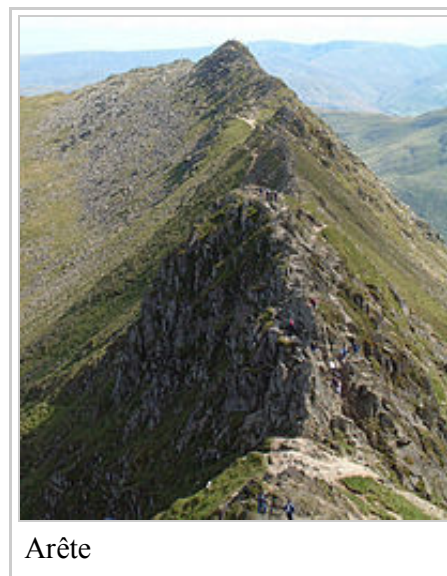
confinement during childbirth; the process of having a baby; only this latter meaning remains in French

acquis communautaire

used in European Union law to refer to the total body of EU law accumulated thus far.

adieu

lit. "to God"; farewell; it carries more weight than *au revoir* ("goodbye," literally "until re-seeing"). It is definitive, implying you will never see the other person again. Depending on the context, misuse of this term can be considered as an insult, as one may wish for the other person's death or say that you do not wish to see the other person ever again while alive. It is used for *au revoir* in the south of France^[3] and to denote a deprivation from someone or something.



Arête

aide-de-camp

lit. "camp helper"; A military officer who serves as an adjutant to a higher-ranking officer, prince or other high political dignitary.

aide-mémoire

lit. "memory aid"; an object or memorandum to assist in remembrance, or a diplomatic paper proposing the major points of discussion

Allons-y!

"Let's go!"

The letter "y" is the place, as in "il y a" ("there is").

amour propre

"Self-love", Self-respect.

amuse-bouche or amuse-gueule

lit. "mouth amuser"; a single, bite-sized hors d'œuvre. In France, the exact expression used is *amuse-gueule*, *gueule* being slang for mouth (*gueule* is the mouth of a carnivorous animal; when used to describe the mouth of a human, it is vulgar), although the expression in itself is not vulgar (see also: cul-de-sac).

ancien régime

a sociopolitical or other system that no longer exists, an allusion to pre-revolutionary France (used

with capital letters in French with this meaning: Ancien Régime)

aperçu

preview; a first impression; initial insight.

apéritif or aperitif

lit. "[drink] opening the appetite", a before-meal drink.^[4] In colloquial French, *un apéritif* is usually shortened to *un apéro*.

appellation contrôlée

supervised use of a name. For the conventional use of the term, see Appellation d'origine contrôlée

appetence

1. A natural craving or desire 2. An attraction or affinity; From French word "Appétence", derived from "Appétit" (Appetite).

après moi, le déluge

lit. "After me, the deluge", a remark attributed to Louis XV of France in reference to the impending end of a functioning French monarchy and predicting the French Revolution. It is derived from Madame de Pompadour's *après nous, le déluge*, "after us, the deluge". The Royal Air Force No. 617 Squadron, famously known as the "Dambusters", uses this as its motto.

arête

a narrow ridge. In French, also fishbone; edge of a polyhedron or graph; bridge of the nose.

armoire

a type of cabinet; wardrobe.

arrière-pensée

ulterior motive; concealed thought, plan, or motive.

art nouveau

a style of decoration and architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It takes a capital in French (*Art nouveau*).

attaché

a person attached to an embassy; in French it is also the past participle of the verb *attacher* (= to fasten, to tighten, to be linked)

Attaque au Fer

an attack on the opponent's blade in fencing, e.g. beat, expulsion, pressure.

au contraire

on the contrary.

au courant

up-to-date; abreast of current affairs.

au fait

being conversant in or with, or instructed in or with. In English "by the way".

au gratin

"with gratings", anything that is grated onto a food dish. In English, specifically 'with cheese'.

au jus

lit. "with juice", referring to a food course served with sauce. Often redundantly formulated, as in 'Open-faced steak sandwich, served with au jus.' No longer used in French, except for the colloquial, *être au jus* (to be informed).

au pair

a young foreigner who does domestic chores in exchange for room and board. In France, those chores are mainly child care/education.

au revoir!

"See you later!" In French a contraction of *Au plaisir de vous revoir* (to the pleasure of seeing you again).

avant-garde (pl. *avant-gardes*)

applied to cutting-edge or radically innovative movements in art, music and literature; figuratively "on the edge," literally, a military term, meaning "vanguard" (which is a corruption of *avant-garde*) or "advance guard," in other words, "first to attack" (antonym of *arrière-garde*).

avant la lettre

used to describe something or someone seen as a forerunner of something (such as an artistic or political movement) before that something was recognized and named, e.g., "a post-modernist avant la lettre," "a feminist avant la lettre." The expression literally means *before the letter*, i.e., "before it had a name." The French modern form of this expression is "avant l'heure".

avoirdupois

used in Middle English, avoir de pois = commodities sold by weight, alteration of Old French avoir de peis = goods of weight

B**baguette**

a long, narrow loaf of bread with a crisp crust, often called 'French bread' or 'French stick' in the United Kingdom. In French, a "baguette" is any long and narrow, stick-like object.

ballet

a type of performance dance, best known for its flowing and precise acrobatic movements and for featuring female dancers on their toes. The French word in turn has its origin in Italian *balletto*, a diminutive of *ballo* (dance) which comes from Latin *ballo*, *ballare*, meaning "to dance",^{[5][6]} which in turn comes from the Greek "βαλλίζω" (*ballizo*), "to dance, to jump about".^{[7][8]}

banquette

a long upholstered bench or a sofa.

beaucoup de

Used interchangeably with the English equivalent of "lots of/many/a great number of".

Appropriate when the speaker wants to convey a greater positive connotation and/or greater emphasis. Often used as an informal expression, mostly in small regional dialect-pockets in the Canadian Prairies and the American South, especially in Alberta and Louisiana respectively.

beau geste

lit. "beautiful gesture", a gracious gesture, noble in form but often futile or meaningless in substance. This French expression has been pressing at the door of standard English with only partial success, since the appearance of P.C. Wren's *Beau Geste* (1924), the first of his Foreign Legion novels.^[9]

Beaux-Arts

monumental architectural style of the early 20th century made famous by the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

bel esprit (pl. beaux esprits)

lit. "fine mind"; a cultivated, highly intelligent person.

belle

a beautiful woman or girl. Common uses of this word are in the phrases *the belle of the ball* (the most beautiful woman or girl present at a function) and *southern belle* (a beautiful woman from the southern states of the US)

Belle Époque

a period in European social history that began during the late 19th century and lasted until World War I.

belles-lettres

lit. "fine letters"; literature regarded for its aesthetic value rather than its didactic or informative content; also, light, stylish writings, usually on literary or intellectual subjects

bien entendu

well understood, well known, obvious - "of course"

bien pensant

lit. "well thinking"; right thinking, orthodox. Commonly implies willful blindness to dangers or suffering faced by others. The noun form *bien-pensance* is rarely seen in English.



Ballet



bric-à-brac



Brioche

billet-doux

lit. "sweet note", love letter^[10]

blasé

unimpressed with something because of over-familiarity, jaded.

bon appétit

lit. "good appetite"; enjoy your meal,

bon mot (pl. *bons mots*)

well-chosen word(s), particularly a witty remark ("each bon mot which falls from his lips is analysed and filed away for posterity", The European Magazine, 29 August – 4 September 1996)

bon vivant

one who enjoys the good life, an epicurean,

bon voyage

lit. "good journey"; have a good trip!

boulevard

a type of large road, usually running through a city.

bourgeois

member of the bourgeoisie, originally shopkeepers living in towns in the Middle Ages. Now the term is derogatory, and it applies to a person whose beliefs, attitudes, and practices are conventionally middle-class.

bouquet

a bunch of flowers.

bric-à-brac

small ornamental objects, less valuable than antiques; a collection of old furniture, china, plates and curiosities. Cf. *de bric et de broc*, corresponding to our "by hook or by crook," and *brack*, refuse.

brioche

a sweet yeast bun, kind of a crossover between a popover and a light muffin; French also use the term as slang for 'potbelly', because of the overhang effect.

brunette

a brown-haired girl. For brown-haired man, French uses *brun* and for a woman *brune*. *Brunette* is rarely used in French.

bureau (pl. *bureaux*)

office; originally meant "desk" in French.

C

ça ne fait rien

"that doesn't matter"; rendered as *san fairy Ann* in British World War I slang.^[11]

cache

a collection of items of the same type stored in a hidden or inaccessible place (such as in an oubliette)

cachet

lit. "stamp"; a distinctive quality; quality, prestige.

café

a coffee shop (also used in French for "coffee").

café au lait

coffee with milk; or a light-brown color. In medicine, it is also used to describe a birthmark that is of a light-brown color (café au lait spot).

calque

a copied term/thing.

canard

(1) unfounded rumor or anecdote. (2) a leading airfoil attached to an aircraft forward of the main wing. ('canard' means 'duck' in French; also a slang word for 'newspaper')

carte blanche

lit. "white card" (i.e. blank check); unlimited authority.

carte de visite

lit. "visiting card" ; a calling card.

c'est la vie!

"That's life!" or "Such is life!" It is sometimes used as an expression to say that life is harsh but that one must accept it.

chaise longue

a long chair for reclining.

Champs-Élysées

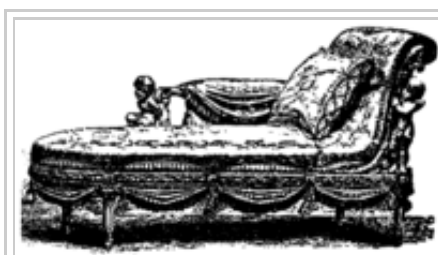
lit. "Elysian Fields"; *Avenue des Champs-Élysées*, one of the broadest boulevards in Paris. Often referred to as simply *les Champs*.

chanteuse

a female singer.^[12]



Café au lait



Chaise longue



Chauffeur



Chignon

chargé d'affaires

a diplomat left in charge of day-to-day business at a diplomatic mission. Within the United States Department of State a chargé is any officer left in charge of the mission in the absence of the titular chief of mission.

chauffeur

driver.

chef d'œuvre

a masterpiece.

cherchez la femme

"look for / seek the woman," in the sense that, when a man behaves out of character or in an otherwise apparently inexplicable manner, the reason may be found in his trying to cover up an illicit affair with a woman, or to impress or gain favour with a woman. This expression was first used in a novel by Alexandre Dumas (père), in the third chapter of *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854), in the form of 'cherchons la femme' (*let's look for the woman*). The expression is found in John Latey's 1878 English translation: "Ah! Monsieur Jackal, you were right when you said, 'Seek the woman.'" The phrase was adopted into everyday English use and crossed the Atlantic by 1909.^[13]



Contre-jour



Creperie

chez

at the house of: often used in the names of restaurants and the like; *Chez Marie* = "Marie's".

chic

stylish.

chignon

a hairstyle worn in a roll at the nape of the neck.

cinéma pur

an avant-garde film movement which was born in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s.

cinéma vérité

realism in documentary filmmaking. "Vérité" means "truth".

cliché

originally referred to a printer's block used to reproduce type, compare the original meaning of stereotype. A phrase that has become trite through overuse; a stereotype.

clique

a small exclusive group of friends; always used in a pejorative way in French.

cloisonné

an ancient technique for decorating metalwork objects.

commandant

a commanding officer. In France, used for an airline pilot (*le commandant de bord*), in the Army as appellative for a *chef de bataillon* or a *chef d'escadron* (roughly equivalent to a major) or in the Navy for any officer from *capitaine de corvette* to *capitaine de vaisseau* (equivalent to the Army's majors, lieutenant-colonels and colonels) or for any officer heading a ship.

comme ci, comme ça lit. "like this, like that"; neither good nor bad, so-so.

communiqué

lit. "communicated"; an official communication.

concierge

a receptionist at a hotel or residence.

concordat

an agreement; a treaty; when used with a capital C in French, it refers to the treaty between the French State and Judaeo-Christian religions during the French Empire (Napoleon): priests, ministers and rabbis became civil servants. This treaty was abolished in 1905 (law Church-State separation) but is still in use in Alsace-Lorraine (those territories were under German administration during 1871–1918).

confrère (also confrere)

a colleague, an associate^[14]

contre-coup

against the blow. This word describes the repercussion of a physical or mental shock, or an indirect consequence of an event.

contre-jour

against daylight. This word (mostly used in art namely photography, cinema or painting) describes the light that illumines an object from the other side of your own point of view.

contretemps

an awkward clash; a delay.

coquette

a flirtatious girl; a tease.

cordon bleu

a cordon bleu may refer to several things, both in French and in English :

- A person who excels in cooking. - An award given to such a person. - An international group of hospitality management and cooking schools teaching French cuisine, founded in France. - An escalope of veal, chicken or pork stuffed with ham and cheese, then breaded and fried.

cordon sanitaire

a policy of containment directed against a hostile entity or ideology; a chain of buffer states; lit. "quarantine line".

corniche

a road that clings like a ledge to the side of a cliff or mountain.

cortège

a funeral procession; in French has a broader meaning and refers to all kinds of processions.

coup de foudre

lit. "thunderbolt" ("strike of thunder"); a sudden unforeseen event, usually used to describe love at first sight.

coup d'état

political coup, government overthrow

coup de grâce

the final blow that results in victory (lit. "blow of mercy"), historically used in the context of the battlefield to refer to the killing of badly wounded enemy soldiers, now more often used in a figurative context (e.g., business).

coup de main

(lit. "a blow with the hand."), means "help from someone".

Example : "Besoin d'un coup de main ?" means "Need help ?"

coup de maître

stroke of the master, master stroke. This word describes a planned action skilfully done. See also tour de force below

coup de théâtre

a dramatic turn of events.^[15]

coup d'œil

lit. "a blow (or touch) of the eye"; a glance.

couture

fashion (usually refers to high fashion).

couturier

a fashion designer (usually refers to high fashion, rather than everyday clothes design. In French, it means 'tailor'; a *couturière* is a seamstress.

crèche

a nativity display; more commonly (in the United Kingdom), a place where children are left by their parents for short periods in the supervision of childminders; both meanings still exist in French.^[16]

crème brûlée

lit. "burnt cream"; a dessert consisting primarily of custard and toasted sugar, that is, caramel.

crème de la crème

best of the best, "cream of the cream," used to describe highly skilled people or objects. A synonymous expression in French is *fin du fin*.

crème fraîche

lit. "fresh cream," a heavy cream slightly soured with bacterial culture, but not as sour or as thick as sour cream and does not curdle.

crêpe

a thin sweet or savoury pancake eaten as a light meal or dessert.

crêperie

a takeaway restaurant or stall, serving crêpes as a form of fast food or street food, or may be a more formal sit-down restaurant or café.

critique

a critical analysis or evaluation of a work, or the art of criticizing. From Latin *criticus*, from Ancient Greek κριτικός (*kritikos*).



Cul-de-sac

croissant

a crescent-shaped bread made of flaky pastry.

cul-de-sac

lit. "arse [buttocks] of the bag"; a dead-end street. Even though *cul* is vulgar in French, this expression in itself is not (see also *amuse-gueule*). Equivalent terms *impasse* or *voie sans issue* are also used in French.

D**de rigueur**

required or expected, especially in fashion or etiquette.^[17]

de trop

unnecessary, unwanted, or more than is suitable.

déclassé

of inferior social status.

décolleté

a woman's garment with a low-cut neckline that exposes cleavage, or a situation in which a woman's chest or cleavage is exposed; décolletage is dealt with below.

décor

the layout and furnishing of a room.

découpage

decoration with cut paper.

demi-glace

a reduced wine-based sauce for meats and poultry.

demi-sec

semi-dry, usually said of wine.

déjà vu

lit. "already seen": an impression or illusion of having seen or experienced something before.

dénouement

lit. "untying": the resolution of a narrative.

dépanneur

(Quebec English) a convenience store.

dérailleur

a bicycle gear-shift mechanism.

dernier cri

lit. "latest scream": the latest fashion.

derrière

lit. "behind": rear, buttocks.

déshabillé

partially clad or scantily dressed; also a special type of garment.

détente

easing of diplomatic tension.

digestif

a digestive aid, esp., an after-dinner drink, as brandy.^[18]

directeur sportif

lit. "sports director". A person responsible for the operation of a cycling team during a road



Dressage

bicycle race. In French, it means any kind of sports director.

divertissement

an amusing diversion; entertainment.

dossier

a file containing detailed information about a person.^[19] In modern French it can be any type of file, including a computer directory. In slang, *J'ai des dossiers sur toi* ("I have files about you") means having materials for blackmail.

doyen

the senior member of a group; the feminine is doyenne.^[20] Also dean (of faculty, or medicine).

dressage

a form of competitive horse training, in French has the broader meaning of taming any kind of animal.

droit du seigneur

lit. "right of the lord": the purported right of a lord in feudal times to take the virginity of one of his vassals' brides on her wedding night (in precedence to her new husband). The French term for this hypothetical custom is *droit de cuissage* (from *cuisse*: thigh).

du jour

lit. "of the day": said of something fashionable or hip for a day and quickly forgotten; today's choice on the menu, as *soup du jour* .^[21]

E

eau de Cologne

a type of perfume, originating in Cologne. Its Italian creator used a French name to commercialize it, Cologne at that time being under the control of France.

eau de toilette

lit. "grooming water." It usually refers to an aromatic product that is less expensive than a perfume because it has less of the aromatic compounds and is more for an everyday use. Cannot be shortened to *eau*, which means something else altogether in French (water).

eau de vie

lit. "water of life" (cf. Aquavit and whisky), a type of fruit brandy.

écarté



eau de Cologne

a card game; also a ballet position.

échappé

dance movement foot position.

éclair

a cream and chocolate icing pastry.

éclat

great brilliance, as of performance or achievement.

Conspicuous success. Great acclamation or applause.^[22]

écorché

flayed; biological graphic or model with skin removed.

élan

a distinctive flair or style.

élan vital

lit. "vital ardor"; the vital force hypothesized by Henri Bergson as a source of efficient causation and evolution in nature; also called "life-force"

éminence grise

lit. "grey eminence": a publicity-shy person with little formal power but great influence over those in authority.

en banc

court hearing of the entire group of judges instead of a subset panel.

en bloc

as a group.

en garde

"[be] on [your] guard," used in fencing, and sometimes mistranscribed as "on guard."

en passant

in passing; term used in chess.

en pointe

(in ballet) on tiptoe. Though used in French in this same context, it is not an expression as such. A *pointe* is the ballet figure where one stands on tiptoes. The expression "en pointe," though, means "in an acute angle," and, figuratively, it qualifies the most progressive or modern things (ideas, industry...).



eau de vie



Entrée



En plein air

en route

on the way

enfant terrible

lit. "terrible child;" a disruptively unconventional person.

ennui

A gripping listlessness or melancholia caused by boredom; depression

entente

diplomatic agreement or cooperation. L'Entente cordiale (the Cordial Entente) refers to the good diplomatic relationship between France and United Kingdom before the first World War.

entre nous

lit. "between us"; confidentially.

entrée

lit. "entrance"; the first course of a meal (UK English); used to denote the main dish or course of a meal (US English).

entremets

desserts/sweet dishes. More literally, a side dish that can be served between the courses of a meal.

entrepreneur

a person who undertakes and operates a new enterprise or venture and assumes some accountability for the inherent risks.

embonpoint

a plump, hourglass figure.

épater la bourgeoisie or épater le bourgeois

lit. "to shock the middle classes,"^[23] a rallying cry for the French Decadent poets of the late 19th century including Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud.^{[24][25]}

escargot

snail; in English, used only as a culinary term.

esprit de corps

lit. "spirit of the body [group]": a feeling of solidarity among members of a group; morale. Often used in connection with a military force.

esprit de l'escalier

lit. "wit of the stairs"; a concise, clever statement you think of too late, that is, on the stairs leaving the scene. The expression was created by French philosopher Denis Diderot. Very rarely used in



en pointe

French.

l'État, c'est moi!

lit. "I am the state!" — attributed to the archetypal absolute monarch, Louis XIV of France.

étude

a musical composition designed to provide practice in a particular technical skill in the performance of an instrument. French for "study."

étui

small ornamental case for needles or cosmetics.

excusez-moi

"Excuse me".

extraordinaire

extraordinary, usually as a following adjective, as "musician extraordinaire."

F

façade

the front view of an edifice (from the Italian *facciata*, or face); a fake persona, as in "putting on a façade" (the *ç* is pronounced like an *s*)

fait accompli

lit. "accomplished fact"; something that has already happened and is thus unlikely to be reversed, a done deal.^[26] In French used only in the expression *placer/mettre quelqu'un devant le fait accompli* meaning to present somebody with a fait accompli.

faute de mieux

for want of better.

faux

false, ersatz, fake.

faux pas

lit. "false step": violation of accepted, although unwritten, social rules.^[27]

femme fatale

lit. "deadly woman": an attractive woman who seduces and takes advantage of men for her personal goals, after which she discards or abandons them. It extends to describe an attractive woman with whom a relationship is likely to result, or has already resulted, in pain and sorrow.^[28]

feuilleton

lit. "little leaf of paper": a periodical, or part of a periodical, consisting chiefly of non-political news and gossip, literature and art criticism, a chronicle of the latest fashions, and epigrams,

charades and other literary trifles.

fiancé(e)

betrothed; lit. a man/woman engaged to be married.

film noir

Lit. "black film": a genre of dark-themed movies from the 1940s and 1950s that focus on stories of crime and immorality.

fil

lit. "son": used after a man's surname to distinguish a son from a father, as Alexandre Dumas, fils.

flambé

a cooking procedure in which alcohol (ethanol) is added to a hot pan to create a burst of flames, meaning "flamed" in French. Also used colloquially in reference to something on fire or burned.

flambeau

a lit torch.

flâneur

a gentleman stroller of city streets; an aimless idler.

fleur-de-lis

a stylized-flower heraldic device; the golden *fleur-de-lis* on an azure background were the arms of the French Kingdom (often spelled with the old French style as "fleur-de-lys").

fleur de sel

lit. "flower of salt," hand-harvested sea salt collected by workers who scrape only the top layer of salt before it sinks to the bottom of large salt pans. Is one of the more expensive salts; traditional French fleur de sel is collected off the coast of Brittany most notably in the town of Guérande (*Fleur de Sel de Guérande* being the most revered), but also in Noirmoutier, Île de Ré and Camargue.

foie gras

fatty liver; usually the liver of overfed goose, hence: *pâté de foie gras*, pâté made from goose liver.

folie à deux

a simultaneous occurrence of delusions in two closely related people, often said of an unsuitable romance. In clinical psychology, the term is used to describe people who share schizophrenic delusions. The derived forms *folie à trois*, *folie à quatre*, *folie en famille* or even *folie à plusieurs* do not exist in French where "collective hysterics" is used.



Fleur-de-lis

force majeure

an overpowering and unforeseeable event, especially when talking about weather (often appears in insurance contracts).

forte

Lit. "strong point" (of a sword). Strength, expertise, one's strong point.

froideur

coldness (for behavior and manners only).

G**gaffe**

blunder

garçon

lit. "boy" or "male servant"; sometimes used by English speakers to summon the attention of a male waiter (has a playful connotation in English but is condescending and possibly offensive in French).

gauche

lit. "left". Clumsy, tactless.

gaucherie

boorishness, clumsiness.

gendarme

a member of the gendarmerie; colloquially, a policeman

gendarmerie

a military body charged with police duties

genre

a type or class, such as "the thriller genre".

gîte

furnished vacation cottage typically in rural France.

glissade

slide down a slope.

Grand Prix

lit. "Great Prize"; a type of motor racing.

Grand Guignol

a horror show, named after a French theater famous for its frightening plays and bloody special effects. (*Guignol* can be



Fleur de sel



Foie gras



Gendarmes



Grand Prix.

used in French to describe a ridiculous person, in the same way that *clown* might be used in English.)

grenadier

a specialized soldier, first established for the throwing of grenades and later as elite troops.

H**habitué**

one who regularly frequents a place.^[29]

haute couture

lit. "high sewing": Paris-based custom-fitted clothing; trend-setting fashion

haute école

lit. "high school": advanced horsemanship.

hauteur

lit. "height": arrogance.^[30]

haut monde

lit. the "high world": fashionable society.

Honi soit qui mal y pense

"Shamed be he who thinks ill of it"; or sometimes translated as "Evil be to him who evil thinks"; the motto of the English Order of the Garter (modern French writes *honni* instead of Old French *honi* and would phrase "qui en pense du mal" instead of "qui mal y pense").

hors de combat

lit. "out of the fight": prevented from fighting or participating in some event, usually by injury.

hors concours

lit. "out of competition": not to be judged with others because of the superiority of the work to the others.

hors d'œuvre

lit. "outside the [main] work": appetizer.

I**idée fixe**

Grenadier



Haute couture

lit. "fixed idea": obsession; in music, a leitmotiv.

impasse

a situation offering no escape, as a difficulty without solution, an argument where no agreement is possible, etc.; a deadlock.^[31]

ingénu(e)

an innocent young man/woman, used particularly in reference to a theatrical stock character who is entirely virginal and wholesome. *L'Ingénu* is a famous novella written by Voltaire.



Ingénue

J

j'accuse

"I accuse"; used generally in reference to a political or social indictment (alluding to the title of Émile Zola's exposé of the Dreyfus affair, a political scandal that divided France from the 1890s to the early 1900s (decade) and involved the false conviction for treason in 1894 of Alfred Dreyfus, a young French artillery officer of Jewish background).

j'adoube

In chess, an expression, said discreetly, that signals the intention to straighten the pieces without committing to move or capturing the first one touched as per the game's rules; lit. "I adjust," from *adouber*, to dub (the action of knightng someone).

je ne regrette rien

"I regret nothing" (from the title of a popular song sung by Édith Piaf: *Non, je ne regrette rien*). Also the phrase the UK's then Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont chose to use to describe his feelings over the events of September 16, 1992 ('Black Wednesday').

je ne sais quoi

lit. "I-don't-know-what": an indescribable or indefinable 'something' that distinguishes the object in question from others that are superficially similar.

jeu d'esprit

lit. "play of spirit": a witty, often light-hearted, comment or composition

jeunesse dorée

lit. "gilded youth"; name given to a body of young dandies, also called the Muscadins, who, after the fall of Robespierre, fought against the Jacobins. Today used for youthful offspring, particularly if bullying and vandalistic, of the affluent.^[32]

joie de vivre

"joy of life/living".

L

l'appel du vide

lit. "call of the void"; used to refer to intellectual suicidal thoughts, or the urge to engage in self-destructive (suicidal) behaviors during everyday life. Examples include thinking about swerving in to the opposite lane while driving, or feeling the urge to jump off a cliff edge while standing on it. These thoughts are not accompanied by emotional distress.

laïcité

separation of the State and the different Churches (at first, it concerned especially Catholicism). In France, where the concept originated, it means an absence of religious interference in government affairs and government interference in religious affairs. But the concept is often assimilated and changed by other countries. For example, in Belgium, it usually means the secular-humanist movement and school of thought.

laissez-faire

lit. "let do"; often used within the context of economic policy or political philosophy, meaning leaving alone, or non-interference. The phrase is the shortcut of *Laissez faire, laissez passer*, a doctrine first supported by the Physiocrats in the 18th century. The motto was invented by Vincent de Gournay, and it became popular among supporters of free-trade and economic liberalism. It is also used to describe a parental style in developmental psychology, where the parent(s) does not apply rules or guiding. As per the parental style, it is now one of the major management styles.

laissez-passer

a travel document, a passport

laissez les bons temps rouler

Cajun expression for "let the good times roll": not used in proper French, and not generally understood by Francophones outside Louisiana, who would say *profitez des bons moments* (enjoy the good moments).

lamé

a type of fabric woven or knit with metallic yarns.

lanterne rouge

the last-place finisher in a cycling stage race; most commonly used in connection with the Tour de France.

lèse majesté

an offense against a sovereign power; or, an attack against someone's dignity or against a custom or institution held sacred (from the Latin *crimen laesae maiestatis*: the crime of injured majesty).

liaison

a close relationship or connection; an affair. The French meaning is broader; *liaison* also means

"bond" such as in *une liaison chimique* (a chemical bond)

lingerie

a type of female underwear.

littérateur

an intellectual (can be pejorative in French, meaning someone who writes a lot but does not have a particular skill).^[33]

louche

of questionable taste, but also someone or something that arouses somebody's suspicions.^[34]

Louis Quatorze

"Louis XIV" (of France), the Sun King, usually a reference to décor or furniture design. Also the namesake of the winner of the 1996 Preakness.

Louis Quinze

"Louis XV" (of France), associated with the rococo style of furniture, architecture and interior decoration

M**macramé**

coarse lace work made with knotted cords.

madame

a woman brothel-keeper (Fowler's Modern English Usage, 3rd edition, p. 475).^[35] In French, a title of respect for an older or married woman (literally "my lady").

mademoiselle

lit. "my noble young lady": young unmarried lady, miss.

malaise

a general sense of depression or unease.

mange tout

another phrase describing 'peas' (lit. "Eat-all," because some peas can be cooked and eaten with their pod.)

manqué

unfulfilled; failed.

Mardi gras

Fat Tuesday, the last day of eating meat before Lent.

marque

Macramé

a model or brand.

matériel

supplies and equipment, particularly in a military context (French meaning is broader and corresponds more to "hardware")

mauvais quart d'heure

lit. "bad quarter hour": a short unpleasant or uncomfortable moment.

mélange

a mixture.

mêlée

a confused fight; a struggling crowd.

ménage à trois

lit. "household for three": a sexual arrangement between three people.^[36]

métier

a field of work or other activity; usually one in which one has special ability or training.

milieu

social environment; setting (has also the meaning of "middle" in French.)

milieu intérieur

the extra-cellular fluid environment, and its physiological capacity to ensure protective stability for the tissues and organs of multicellular living organisms.

mirepoix

a cooking mixture of two parts onions and one part each of celery and carrots.

mise en place

an assembly of ingredients, usually set up in small bowls, used to facilitate cooking. This means all the raw ingredients are prepared and ready to go before cooking. Translated, "put in place."

mise en scène

the process of setting a stage with regard to placement of actors, scenery, properties, etc.; the stage setting or scenery of a play; surroundings, environment.

mise en table

Mange tout



Mardi gras

table setting.

montage

editing.

le mot juste

lit. "the just word"; the right word at the right time. French uses it often in the expression *chercher le mot juste* (to search for the right word).

motif

a recurrent thematic element.

moue

a pursing together of the lips to indicate dissatisfaction, a pout.

mousse

a whipped dessert or a hairstyling foam; in French, means any type of foam

N**né, née**

lit. "born": a man's/woman's birth name (maiden name for a woman), e.g., "Martha Washington, *née* Dandridge."

n'est-ce pas?

"isn't it [true]?"; asked rhetorically after a statement, as in "Right?".

noblesse oblige

"nobility obliges"; those granted a higher station in life have a duty to extend (possibly token) favours/courtesies to those in lower stations.

nom de guerre

pseudonym to disguise the identity of a leader of a militant group, literally "war name," used in France for "pseudonym".^[37]

nom de plume

lit. "pen name": author's pseudonym. Originally an English phrase, now also used in France.

nouveau (pl. nouveaux; fem. nouvelle; fem. pl. nouvelles)

new.

nouveau riche

lit. "newly rich", used to refer particularly to those living a garish lifestyle with their newfound wealth; see also arriviste and parvenu.

nouvelle vague

lit. "new wave." Used for stating a new way or a new trend of something. Originally marked a new

style of French filmmaking in the late 1950s and early 1960s, reacting against films seen as too literary.

O

objet d'art

a work of art, commonly a painting or sculpture; also a utilitarian object displayed for its aesthetic qualities

objet trouvé

an ordinary object, as a piece of driftwood, a shell, or a manufactured article, that is treated as an object of art by one who finds it aesthetically pleasing.^[38]

œuvre

"work," in the sense of an artist's work; by extension, an artist's entire body of work.

omelette

dish made from beaten eggs cooked quickly in a pan.

opéra bouffe

comedy, satire, parody or farce.

outré

exceeding the lines of propriety; eccentric in behavior or appearance in an inappropriate way

P

pain au chocolat

lit. "chocolate bread". Unlike that which its name may suggest, it's not made of bread but puff pastry with chocolate inside. The term "chocolatine" is used in some Francophone areas (especially the South-West) and sometimes in English.



Pain au chocolat

pain aux raisins

raisin bread.

panache

verve; flamboyance.

papier-mâché

lit. "chewed paper"; a craft medium using paper and paste.

par avion

by aircraft. In English, specifically by air mail, from the phrase found on air mail envelopes.



Parkour

par excellence

"by excellence": quintessential.^[39]

parc fermé

lit. "closed park". A secure area at a Grand Prix circuit where the cars may be stored overnight.

parkour

urban street sport involving climbing and leaping, using buildings, walls, curbs to ricochet off much as if one were on a skateboard, often in follow-the-leader style. Originally a phonetic form of the French word *parcours*, which means "run." Also known as, or the predecessor to, "free running", developed by Sébastien Foucan.

parole

1) (in linguistics) speech, more specifically the individual, personal phenomenon of language; see *langue* and *parole*. 2) (in criminal justice) conditional early release from prison; see *parole*.

parvenu

a social upstart.

pas de deux

lit. "step for two"; in ballet, a dance or figure for two performers, a duet; also a close relationship between two people.^[40]

pas de trois

lit. "step for three"; in ballet, a dance or figure for three performers.

passe-partout

a document or key that allows the holder to travel without hindrance from the authorities or enter any location.

pastiche

a derivative work; an imitation.

patois

a dialect; jargon.^[41]

père

lit. "father", used after a man's surname to distinguish a father from a son, as in Alexandre Dumas, père.

peloton

in cycling, the main group of riders in a road race.



Pince-nez

petite bourgeoisie

often anglicised as "petty bourgeoisie," used to designate the lower middle class.

la petite mort

lit. "the little death"; an expression for orgasm.

Pied-Noir

lit. "black foot," a European Algerian in the pre-independence state.

pied-à-terre (also pied à terre)

lit. "foot-on-the-ground"; a place to stay, generally applied to the city house as opposed to the country estate of the wealthy.^[42]

pince-nez

lit. "nose-pincher", a type of spectacles without temple arms.

piste

lit. "trail" or "track"; often used referring to skiing at a ski area (on piste) versus skiing in the back country (off piste).

plage

beach, especially a fashionable seaside resort.

plat du jour

lit. "dish of the day"; a dish served in a restaurant on a particular day but separate from the regular menu.

plongeur (fem. plongeuse)

a male (or female) dishwasher.

plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose (or plus ça change, plus c'est pareil) (often abbreviated to just "plus ça change")

the more things change, the more they stay the same.

point d'appui

a location where troops assemble prior to a battle. While this figurative meaning also exists in French, the first and literal meaning of "point d'appui" is a fixed point from which a person or thing executes a movement (such as a footing in climbing or a pivot).

porte cochère

an architectural term referring to a kind of porch or porticolike structure.

poseur

lit. "poser": a person who pretends to be something he is not; an affected or insincere person; a wannabe.

pot-au-feu

stew, soup.

pour encourager les autres

lit. "to encourage others"; said of an excessive punishment meted out as an example. The original is from Voltaire's *Candide* and referred to the execution of Admiral John Byng.^[43]

pourboire

lit. "for drink"; gratuity, tip; **donner un pourboire**: to tip.

prairie

Prairie is the French word for meadow. Great natural meadows of long grass.

prêt-à-porter

lit. "ready to wear"; clothing off the shelf, in contrast to *haute couture*.

prie-dieu

lit. "pray [to] God"; a type of prayer desk.

prix fixe

lit. "fixed price"; a menu on which multi-course meals with only a few choices are charged at a fixed price.

protégé(e)

lit. "protected"; a man/woman who receives support from an influential mentor.^[44]

provocateur

an agitator, a polemicist.

Q**Quai d'Orsay**

address of the French foreign ministry in Paris, used to refer to the ministry itself.

Quatorze juillet

"14th of July," usually called Bastille Day in English. The beginning of the French Revolution in 1789; used to refer to the Revolution itself and its ideals. It is the French National Day.

quelle horreur!

What a horrible thing! (can be used sarcastically).

R**raconteur**

a storyteller.^[45]

raison d'être

"reason for being": justification or purpose of existence.

rapport

to be in someone's "good graces"; to be in synch with someone; "I've developed a rapport with my co-workers";
French for: relationship.

rapprochement

the establishment of cordial relations, often used in diplomacy.^[46]



Roux

reconnaissance

scouting; like connoisseur. Modern French uses an "a," never a "o" (as in reconnoissance). In French, it also means 'gratitude'.

renaissance

lit. "rebirth", a reintroduction of something previously deemed outdated; in particular, a cultural movement in the 14-17th centuries marked by a return to classical aesthetics.

répertoire

a stock of plays, dances, or pieces that a company or a performer knows or is prepared to perform; the whole body of items that are regularly performed.

reportage

reporting; journalism.

répondez s'il vous plaît. (RSVP)

Please reply. Though francophones may use more usually "prière de répondre," it is common enough.

restaurateur

a restaurant owner.^[47]

riposte

a quick retort in speech or action, or in fencing, a quick thrust after parrying a lunge.^[48]

Rive Gauche

the left (southern) bank (of the River Seine in Paris). A particular mindset attributed to inhabitants of that area, which includes the Sorbonne

roi fainéant

lit. "do-nothing king": an expression first used about the kings of France from 670 to 752 (Thierry III to Childeric III), who were puppets of their ministers. The term was later used about other royalty who had been made powerless, also in other countries, but lost its meaning when parliamentarism made all royals powerless.

rôle

a part or function of a person in a situation or an actor in a play.

roman à clef

lit. "novel with a key": an account of actual persons, places or events in fictional guise.^[49]

roué

an openly debauched, lecherous older man.

roux

a cooked mixture of flour and melted butter (or other fat) used as a base in soups and gravies.

S**sabotage**

subversive destruction, from the practice of workers fearful of industrialization destroying machines by tossing their *sabots* ("wooden shoes") into machinery.

saboteur

one who commits sabotage

sang-froid

lit. "cold blood": coolness and composure under strain; stiff upper lip. Also pejorative in the phrase *meurtre de sang-froid* ("cold-blooded murder").

sans

without.^[50]

sans-culottes

lit. "without knee-breeches," a name the insurgent crowd in the streets of Paris gave to itself during the French Revolution, because they usually wore pantaloons (full-length pants or trousers) instead of the chic knee-length culotte of the nobles. In modern use: holding strong republican views.

sauté

lit. "jumped", from the past participle of the verb sauter (to jump), which can be used as an adjective or a noun; quickly fried in a small amount of oil, stir-fried. ex: sauté of veau.

savant

lit. "knowing": a wise or learned person; in English, one exceptionally gifted in a narrow skill.

savoir-faire

lit. "know how to do"; to respond appropriately to any situation.

savoir-vivre

fact of following conventional norms within a society; etiquette (etiquette also comes from a French word, *étiquette*).

silhouette

the image of a person, an object or scene consisting of the outline and a featureless interior, with

the silhouetted object usually being black.

sobriquet

an assumed name, a nickname (often used in a pejorative way in French).^[51]

soi-disant

lit. "oneself saying"; so-called; self-described.

soigné

fashionable; polished.

soirée

an evening party.

sommelier

a wine steward.

soupçon

a very small amount (In French, can also mean *suspicion*)

soupe du jour

lit. "soup of the day", meaning the particular kind of soup offered that day.

succès d'estime

lit. "success of esteem"; [critical success], sometimes used pejoratively.^[52]

T**tableau**

chalkboard. The meaning is broader in French: all types of board (chalkboard, whiteboard, notice board...). Refers also to a painting (see *tableau vivant*, below) or a table (chart).

tableau vivant

lit. "living picture"; the term describes a striking group of suitably costumed actors or artist's models, carefully posed and often theatrically lit.



Tableau vivant

tenné

orange-brown, "rust" colour, not commonly used outside heraldic emblazoning.

tête-à-tête

lit. "head to head"; an intimate get-together or private conversation between two people.

toilette

the process of dressing or grooming. Also refers in French, when plural (*les toilettes*), to the toilet room.

torsades de pointes

meaning "twisting around a point," used to describe a particular type of heart rhythm.

touché

lit. "touched" or "hit!": acknowledgment of an effective counterpoint or verbal riposte; comes from terminology in the sport of fencing. Not understandable in modern French, as "touché" means "emotionally touched".

tour de force (also tour-de-force)

lit. "feat of strength": a masterly or brilliant stroke, creation, effect, or accomplishment.^{[53][54]}

tout court

lit. "all short": typically used in philosophy to mean "nothing else", in contrast to a more detailed or extravagant alternative. For instance, "Kant does not believe that morality derives from practical reason as applied to moral ends, but from practical reason tout court".

tout de suite

right now. Often mangled as "toot sweet".

tranche

lit. "slice": one of several different classes of securities involved a single financial transaction.^[55]

triage

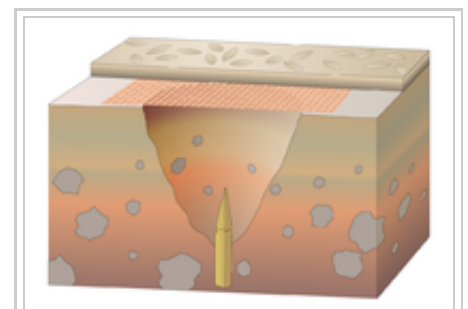
during a medical emergency or disaster, the process of determining the priority of medical treatment or transportation based on the severity of the patient's condition.

tricoteuse

a woman who knits and gossips; from the women who knitted and sewed while watching executions of prisoners of the French Revolution.

trompe-l'œil

lit. "trick the eye"; photographic realism in fine-art painting or decorative painting in a home.



Trou de loup

trou de loup

lit. "wolf hole"; a kind of booby trap.

V**venu(e)**

an invited man/woman for a show, or "one who has come"; the term is unused in modern French, though it can still be heard in a few expressions like *bienvenu/e* (literally "well come": welcome) or *le premier venu* (anyone; literally, "the first who came").

vin de pays

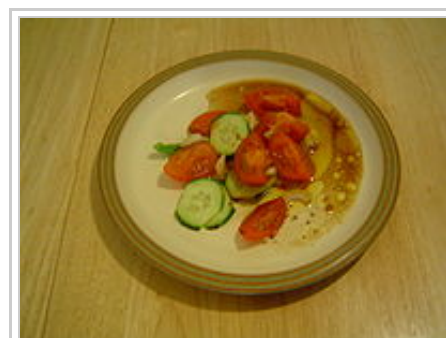
lit. "country wine"; wine of a lower designated quality than *appellation contrôlée*.

vinaigrette

diminutive of *vinaigre* (vinegar): salad dressing of oil and vinegar.

vis-à-vis (also vis-a-vis)

lit. "face to face [with]": in comparison with or in relation to; opposed to. From *vis*, an obsolete word for "face", replaced by *visage* in contemporary French.^[56] In French, this is also a real estate vocabulary word, meaning that your windows and your neighbours' are within sighting distance (more precisely, that you can see inside of their home).



Salad with vinaigrette dressing

vive [...]!

"Long live...!"; lit. "Live"; as in "*Vive la France!*", *Vive la République!*, *Vive la Résistance!*, *Vive le Canada!*, or *Vive le Québec libre!* (long live free Quebec, a sovereigntist slogan famously used by French President Charles de Gaulle in 1967 in Montreal). Unlike *viva* (Italian and Spanish) or *vivat* (Latin), it cannot be used alone; it needs a complement.

vive la différence!

lit. "[long] live the difference"; originally referring to the difference between the sexes; the phrase may be also used to celebrate the difference between any two groups of people (or simply the general diversity of individuals).

voilà!

lit. "see there"; in French it can mean simply "there it is"; in English it is generally restricted to a triumphant revelation.

volte-face

frenchified form of Italian *volta faccia*, lit. "turn face", an about-face, a maneuver in marching; figuratively, a complete reversal of opinion or position.

voulez-vous coucher avec moi (ce soir)?

"Do you want to sleep with me (tonight)?" In French, *coucher* is vulgar in this sense. In English it appears in Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as in the lyrics of a popular song by Labelle, "Lady Marmalade."

voyeur

lit. "someone who sees"; a Peeping Tom.^[57]

Z

zut alors!

"Darn it!" or the British expression "Blimey!" This is a general exclamation (vulgar equivalent is

merde alors ! "Damn it!"). Just plain *zut* is also in use, often repeated for effect: *zut, zut et zut!* There is an album by Frank Zappa, punningly titled *Zoot Allures*. The phrase is also used on the *Saturday Night Live* Weekend Update sketch by recurring character Jean K. Jean, played by Kenan Thompson.

Not used as such in French

Through the evolution of the language, many words and phrases are no longer used in modern French. Also there are expressions that, even though grammatically correct, do not have the same meaning in French as the English words derived from them. Some older word usages still appear in Quebec French.

accoutrement

personal military or fighting armaments worn about one's self; has come to mean the accompanying items available to pursue a mission, or just accessories in general. In French, means a funny or ridiculous clothing; often a weird disguise or a getup, though it can be said also for people with bad taste in clothing.

agent provocateur

a police spy who infiltrates a group to disrupt or discredit it. In French it has both a broader and more specific meaning. The Académie française, in its dictionary, says that an agent provocateur is a person working for another State or a political party (for example), whose mission is to provoke troubles in order to justify repression.

appliqué

an inlaid or attached decorative feature. Lit. "applied," though this meaning doesn't exist as such in French, the dictionary of the Académie française indicates that in the context of the arts, "arts appliqués" is synonym of decorative arts.

après-ski

after skiing socializing after a ski session; in French, this word refers to boots used to walk in snow (e.g. MoonBoots).

artiste

a skilled performer, a person with artistic pretensions. In French: an artist. Can be used ironically for a person demonstrating little professional skill or passion.

arrêt à bon temps

A counterattack that attempts to take advantage of an uncertain attack in fencing. Though grammatically correct, this expression is not used in French. The term "arrêt" exists in fencing, with the meaning of a "simple counteroffensive action"; the general meaning is "a stop." A French expression is close, though: "s'arrêter à temps" (to stop in time).

auteur

A film director, specifically one who controls most aspects of a film, or other controller of an

artistic situation. The English connotation derives from French film theory. It was popularized in the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*: auteur theory maintains that directors like Hitchcock exert a level of creative control equivalent to the author of a literary work. In French, the word means *author*, but some expressions like "cinéma d'auteur" are also in use.

au naturel

nude; in French, literally, in a natural manner or way (*au* is the contraction of *à le*, masculine form of *à la*). It means "in an unaltered way" and can be used either for people or things. For people, it rather refers to a person who does not use make-up or artificial manners (*un entretien au naturel* = a backstage interview). For things, it means that they have not been altered. Often used in cooking, like *thon au naturel*: canned tuna without any spices or oil. Also in heraldry, meaning "in natural colours," especially flesh colour, which is not one of the "standard" colours of heraldry.

à la mode

fashionable; or with ice cream (in the US), or with cheese (in some US regions). In French, it mainly means "fashionable" but is occasionally a culinary term usually meaning something cooked with carrots and onions, as in *boeuf à la mode*.

bête noire

a scary or unpopular person, idea, or thing, or the archetypical scary monster in a story; literally "black beast." In French, *être la bête noire de quelqu'un* ("to be somebody's black beast") means that you're particularly hated by this person or this person has a strong aversion against you, regardless of whether you're scary or not. The dictionary of the Académie française admits its use only for people, though other dictionaries admits it for things or ideas too. It also means that one is repeatedly defeated by a person (for instance, "Nadal is the bete noire of Roger Federer"). Colloquial in French.

boutique

a clothing store, usually selling designer/one off pieces rather than mass-produced clothes. Can also describe a quirky and/or upmarket hotel. In French, it can describe any shop, clothing or otherwise.

boutonnière

In English, a boutonnière is a flower placed in the buttonhole of a suit jacket. In French, a boutonnière is the buttonhole itself.

c'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre

"it is magnificent, but it is not war" — quotation from Marshal Pierre Bosquet commenting on the charge of the Light Brigade. Unknown quotation in French.

cause célèbre

An issue arousing widespread controversy or heated public debate, lit. 'famous cause'. It is correct grammatically, but the expression is not used in French.

chacun à son goût

the correct expressions in French are *chacun ses goûts* / *à chacun ses goûts* / *à chacun son goût*: "to each his/her own taste(s)".

chanson

a classical "art song," equiv. to the German *Lied* or the Italian *aria*; or, in Russian, a cabaret-style sung narrative, usually rendered by a guttural male voice with guitar accompaniment. In French, it simply means a song.

château

a manor house or a country house of nobility or gentry, with or without fortifications, originally—and still most frequently—in French-speaking regions. The word *château* is also used for castles in French, so where clarification is needed, the term *château fort* ("strong castle") is used to describe a castle.

cinq à sept

extraconjugal affair between five and seven pm. In French, though it can also mean this, it primarily means any relaxing time with friends between the end of work and the beginning of the marital obligations.

claque

a group of admirers; in French, *la claque* is a group of people paid to applaud or disturb a piece at the theatre, though the common meaning of "claque" is "a slap"; *clique* is used in this sense (but in a pejorative way).

connoisseur

an expert in wines, fine arts, or other matters of culture; a person of refined taste. It is spelled *connaisseur* in modern French.

corsage

A bouquet of flowers worn on a woman's dress or worn around her wrist. In French, it refers to a woman's chest (from shoulder to waist) and, by extension, the part of a woman's garment that covers this area.

coup de main (pl. coups de main)

a surprise attack. In French, *[donner] un coup de main* means "[to give] a hand" (to give assistance). Even if the English meaning exists as well (as in *faire le coup de main*), it is old-fashioned.

coup d'état (pl. coups d'État)

a sudden change in government by force; literally "hit (blow) of state." French uses the capital É, because the use of a capital letter alters the meaning of the word (État: a State, as in a country; état: a state of being). It also cannot be shortened as *coup*, which means something else altogether in French.

début

first public performance of an entertainment personality or group. In French, it means "beginning." The English meaning of the word exists only when in the plural form: *[faire] ses débuts [sur scène]* (to make one's débuts on the stage).

décolletage

a low-cut neckline, cleavage. In French it means: 1. action of lowering a female garment's neckline; 2. Agric.: cutting leaves from some cultivated roots such as beets, carrots, etc.; 3. Tech. Operation consisting of making screws, bolts, etc. one after another out of a single bar of metal on a parallel lathe.

démarche

a decisive step. In French, it means a preparing step often used in the plural form, or a distinctive way of walking.

dépanneur

a neighbourhood general/convenience store, term used in eastern Canada (often shortened to *dép* or *dep*). This term is commonly used in Canadian French; however, in France, it means a repairman. In France, a convenience store would be a *supérette* or *épicerie [de quartier]*.

émigré

one who has emigrated for political reasons. French also use the word *exilé* (exiled) or even "exilé politique".

encore

A request to repeat a performance, as in *Encore!*, lit. 'again'; also used to describe additional songs played at the end of a gig. Francophones would say «Une autre !» ('Another one!') or «Bis !» to request « un rappel » or « un bis ».

en masse

in a mass or group, all together. In French, *masse* refers only to a physical mass, whether for people or objects. It cannot be used for something immaterial, like, for example, the voice: "they all together said 'get out'" would be translated as *ils ont dit 'dehors' en chœur* ([like a chorus]). Also, *en masse* refers to numerous people or objects (a crowd or a mountain of things).

en suite

as a set (not to be confused with *ensuite*, meaning "then"). Can refer, in particular, to hotel rooms with attached private bathroom, especially in Britain where hotels without private facilities are more common than in North America. In French, *suite*, when in the context of a hotel, already means several rooms following each other. *J'ai loué une suite au Ritz* would be translated as "I rented a suite at the Ritz." *En suite* is not grammatically incorrect in French, but it is not an expression in itself and it is not used.

épée

a fencing weapon descended from the duelling sword. In French, apart from fencing (the sport) the term is more generic: it means sword.

escritoire

a writing table. It is spelt *écritoire* in modern French.

exposé

a published exposure of a fraud or scandal (past participle of "to expose"); in French refers to a talk or a report on any kind of subject.

femme

a stereotypically effeminate gay man or lesbian (slang, pronounced as written). In French, *femme* (pronounced 'fam') means "woman."

fin de siècle

comparable to (but not exactly the same as) turn-of-the-century but with a connotation of decadence, usually applied to the period from 1890 through 1910. In French, it means "end of the century," but it isn't a recognized expression as such.

forte

a strength, a strong point, typically of a person, from the French *fort(e)* (strong) and/or Italian *forte* (strong, esp. "loud" in music) and/or Latin *forte* (neuter form of *fortis*, strong). French uses *fort(e)* for both people and objects.

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, "In *forte* we have a word derived from French that in its "strong point" sense has no entirely satisfactory pronunciation. Usage writers have denigrated \for-"tA\ and \for-tE\ because they reflect the influence of the Italian-derived *forte*. Their recommended pronunciation \fort\, however, does not exactly reflect French either: the French would write the word *le fort* and would rhyme it with English *for* [French doesn't pronounce the final "t"]. All are standard, however. In British English \fo-"tA\ and \fot\ predominate; \for-"tA\ and \for-tA\ are probably the most frequent pronunciations in American English."

The New Oxford Dictionary of English derives it from fencing. In French, *le fort d'une épée* is the third of a blade nearer the hilt, the strongest part of the sword used for parrying.

la sauce est tout

"The sauce is everything!" or "The secret's in the sauce!" Tagline used in a 1950s American television commercial campaign for an American line of canned food products. Grammatically correct but not used in French, where one might say *Tout est dans la sauce* or *C'est la sauce qui fait (passer) le poisson* (also fig.).

marquee

the sign above a theater that tells you what is playing. From *marquise*, which means not only a marchioness but also an awning. Theater buildings are generally old and nowadays there is never such a sign above them; there is only the advertisement for the play (*l'affiche*).

nostalgie de la boue

"yearning for the mud"; attraction to what is unworthy, crude or degrading.^[58] Though grammatically correct, it is not used in French.

outré

out of the ordinary, unusual. In French, it means outraged (for a person) or exaggerated, extravagant, overdone (for a thing, esp. a praise, an actor's style of acting, etc.); in that second meaning, belongs to "literary" style.

passé

out of fashion. The correct expression in French is *passé de mode*. *Passé* means past, passed, or (for a colour) faded.

peignoir

a woman's dressing gown. In French it is a bathrobe. A dressing gown is a *robe de chambre* (lit. a bedroom dress).

pièce d'occasion

"occasional piece"; item written or composed for a special occasion. In French, it means "second-hand hardware." Can be shortened as *pièce d'occas'* or even *occas'* (pronounced /okaz/).

portemanteau (pl. portemanteaux)

in English a portmanteau is a large piece of luggage for clothes that opens (like a book or a diptych) into two parts. From this literal sense, Lewis Carroll, in his novel *Through the Looking Glass* playfully coined a further figurative sense for portmanteau meaning a word that fuses two or more words or parts of words to give a combined meaning. In French, lit. a 'coat-carrier', originally a person who carried the royal coat or dress train, now a large suitcase; more often, a clothes hanger. The equivalent of the English/ Lewis-Carroll *portemanteau* is *un mot-valise* (lit. a suitcase word).

potpourri

medley, mixture; French write it *pot-pourri*, literally 'rotten pot': primarily a pot in which different kinds of flowers or spices are put to dry for years for the scent.

précis

a concise summary. In French, when talking about a school course, it means an abridged book about the matter. Literally, *précis* means precise, accurate.

première

refers to the first performance of a play, a film, etc. In French, it means "the first", and is used only for a live performance.

raisonneur

a type of author intrusion in which a writer inserts a character to argue the author's viewpoint; alter ego, sometimes called 'author avatar'. In French, a *raisonneur* is a character in a play who stands

for morality and reason, i.e., not necessarily the author's point of view. The first meaning of this word though is a man (fem. *raisonneuse*) who overdoes reasonings, who tires by objecting with numerous arguments to every order.

recherché

lit. searched; obscure; pretentious. In French, means 'sophisticated' or 'delicate', or simply 'studied', without the negative connotations of the English.

rendezvous

lit. "present yourself" or "proceed to"; a meeting, appointment, or date in French, but in English has taken on other overtones. Always hyphenated in French: *rendez-vous*. Its only accepted abbreviation in French is RDV.

reprise

repetition of previous music in a suite, programme, etc. In French, it may mean an alternate version of a piece of music, or a cover version. To express the repetition of a previous musical theme, French would exclusively use the Italian term *coda*.

résumé

in North American English, a document listing one's qualifications for employment. In French, it means summary; French speakers would use instead *curriculum vitae*, or its abbreviation, C.V. (like most other English speakers)

risqué (also risque)

sexually suggestive,^[59] in French, the meaning of *risqué* is "risky," with no sexual connotation. Francophones use instead *osé* (lit. "daring") or sometimes *dévergondé* (very formal language). *Osé*, unlike *dévergondé*, cannot be used for people themselves, only for things (such as pictures) or attitudes.

séance

a gathering, usually using a 'medium', attempting to communicate with the dead. In French, the word means 'sitting' and usually refers to any kind of meeting or session.

table d'hôte (pl. tables d'hôte)

in English, when used it usually refers to type of meal: a full-course meal offered at a fixed price. However in French, it refers to a type of lodging: the closest English equivalent would be "a bed & breakfast" or "B&B." The origin of the meaning (for French speakers) is that at a table d'hôte (literally "table of the house" or "table of the host"), unlike at a full-service purpose-built hotel, all patrons eat together at the host's table, whatever the family have prepared for themselves (typically traditional regional dishes). Indeed, in France today a lodging labelled "table d'hôte" might perhaps not even offer food; the appellation meaning what an English-speaker would think of as a "bed & breakfast -style" family-home lodging (as opposed to a purpose-built hotel).

tableau vivant (pl. tableaux vivants, often shortened as *tableau*)

in drama, a scene where actors remain motionless as if in a picture. *Tableau* means painting, *tableau vivant*, living painting. In French, it is an expression used in body painting.

touché

acknowledgment of an effective counterpoint. In French, used for "emotionally touched".

vignette

a brief description; a short scene. In French, it is a small picture, and now in some European countries also means 'permit for driving on motorways.'

Found only in English

aide-de-camp

"camp assistant"; in the army, a military assistant to a senior military officer (heads of State are considered military officers because of their status as head of the army). In Canada, it may also refer to the honorary position a person holds as a personal assistant to a high civil servant. It exists in French too but is written *aide de camp* (without any hyphens).

chef

in English, a person who cooks professionally for other people. In French, a professional cook is a *restaurateur*. A chef (literally "head"), means a master cook or chief cook. Also, **sous-chef**, the second-in-command, directly under the head chef. Additionally, in a work context, a chef is one's boss.



A Canadian aide-de-camp

cinquefoil

five-petal, five-leaf flower of the genus *Potentilla*, family Rosaceae; also a circular 5-lobed ornamental design. Spelled *quintefeuille* in French.

cri de cœur

"cry from the heart": an impassioned outcry, as of entreaty or protest. In French, the exact expression is *cri **du** cœur*.

demi-monde

a class of women of ill repute; a fringe group or subculture. Fell out of use in the French language in the 19th century. Frenchmen still use *une demi-mondaine* to qualify a woman that lives (exclusively or partially) off the commerce of her charms but in a high-life style.

double entendre

a figure of speech wherein a word or phrases can be taken to have two distinct coherent meanings, most often in a fashion that is suggestive and/or ironic. "Entendre" is an infinitive verb ("to hear"),

not a noun; a correct rendering would be "*à double entente*", an adjectival phrase meaning "of a double understanding or double interpretation" (literally, "with a double hearing"). The modern French phrase is "*à double sens*".

entrée

lit. "entrance"; in French, the first dish that starts a meal, i.e. the entrance to the meal. Synonym of "*hors d'œuvre*". The main dish or "*plat de résistance*" comes after the *entrée*. In American English, the meaning has migrated to "main dish". In other varieties of English it maintains its French meaning.

homage

term used for films that are influenced by other films, in particular by the works of a notable director. French word is written *hommage*, and is used for all shows of admiration, respect, or in a close sense for dedication of an artwork to another.

hors d'oeuvre

term used for the snacks served with drinks before a meal. Literally "outside of the work". The French use *apéritif* to refer to the time before a meal and the drinks consumed during that time, yet "*hors d'œuvre*" is a synonym of "*entrée*" in French and means the first dish that starts a meal.

in lieu (of)

"in place (of)": a hybrid phrase, partially translated from the existing French phrase *au lieu*.

léger de main (legerdemain)

"light of hand": sleight of hand, usually in the context of deception or the art of stage magic tricks. Meaningless in French, and has no equivalent.

maître d'

translates as *master o'*. Francophones would say *maître d'hôtel* (literally "master of the house" or "master of the establishment") instead (French never uses "d' " alone). In French as in English, "maître d'" means the "head waiter", the manager of the service side.

négligée

A robe or a dressing gown, usually of sheer or soft fabric for women. French uses *négligé* (masculine form) or *nuisette*. In French, the word *négligée* qualifies a woman who neglects her appearance.

pièce de résistance (piece de resistance)

the best; the main dish in a meal, or the main item in a series, literally "a piece that resists."^[60] Francophones use *plat de résistance* (main dish).

rouge

lit. "red"; 1) red makeup, also called blusher; 2) in Canadian football, awarded when the ball is kicked into the end zone by any legal means, other than a successful field goal, and the receiving

team does not return, or kick, the ball out of its end zone.

succès de scandale

"Success through scandal"; Francophones might use *succès par médisance*.

voir dire

a trial within a trial, or (in America) jury selection (Law French). Literally "to speak the truth."^[61] (Anglo-Norman *voir* [*truth*] is etymologically unrelated to the modern French *voir* [*to see*]).^[62] In modern American court procedure, the examination of prospective jurors for their qualification to serve, including inherent biases, views and predelictions; during this examination, each prospective juror must "speak the truth" so that counsel and the court may decide whether they should remain on the jury or be excused. In England and Wales, the expression is used to refer to a "trial within a trial," during which a judge hears evidence in the absence of the jury, typically to decide whether a certain piece of evidence should be allowed to be presented to the jury or not. For example, a judge might hold a "voir dire" to determine whether a confession has been extracted from a defendant by an unfair inducement in order to decide whether the jury should hear evidence of the confession or not.

French phrases in international air-sea rescue

International authorities have adopted a number of words and phrases from French for use by speakers of all languages in voice communications during air-sea rescues. Note that the "phonetic" versions of spelling are presented as shown and not the IPA.

SECURITAY

(*sécurité*, "safety") the following is a safety message or warning, the lowest level of danger.

PAN PAN

(*panne*, "breakdown") the following is a message concerning a danger to a person or ship, the next level of danger.

MAYDAY

(*[venez] m'aider*, come to help me"; *aidez-moi* means "help me") the following is a message of extreme urgency, the highest level of danger. (*MAYDAY* is used on voice channels for the same uses as *SOS* on Morse channels.)

SEELONCE

(*silence*, "silence") keep this channel clear for air-sea rescue communications.

SEELONCE FEE NEE

(*silence fini*, "silence is over") this channel is now available again.

PRU DONCE

(*prudence*, "prudence") silence partially lifted, channel may be used again for urgent non-distress communication.

MAY DEE CAL

(*médical*, "medical") medical assistance needed.

It is a serious breach in most countries, and in international zones, to use any of these phrases without justification.

See Mayday (distress signal) for a more detailed explanation.

See also

See also Category:French words and phrases.

- Glossary of ballet, which is predominantly French
- Fencing terms, which are often in French.
- Franglais
- French language
- Law French
- English words of French origin
- Pseudo-Gallicisms
- German expressions in English
- Greek phrases
- Latin phrases
- Latin words with English derivatives
- French loanwords in Persian

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Categories: Lists of phrases | French language | Lists of English words of French origin

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